

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

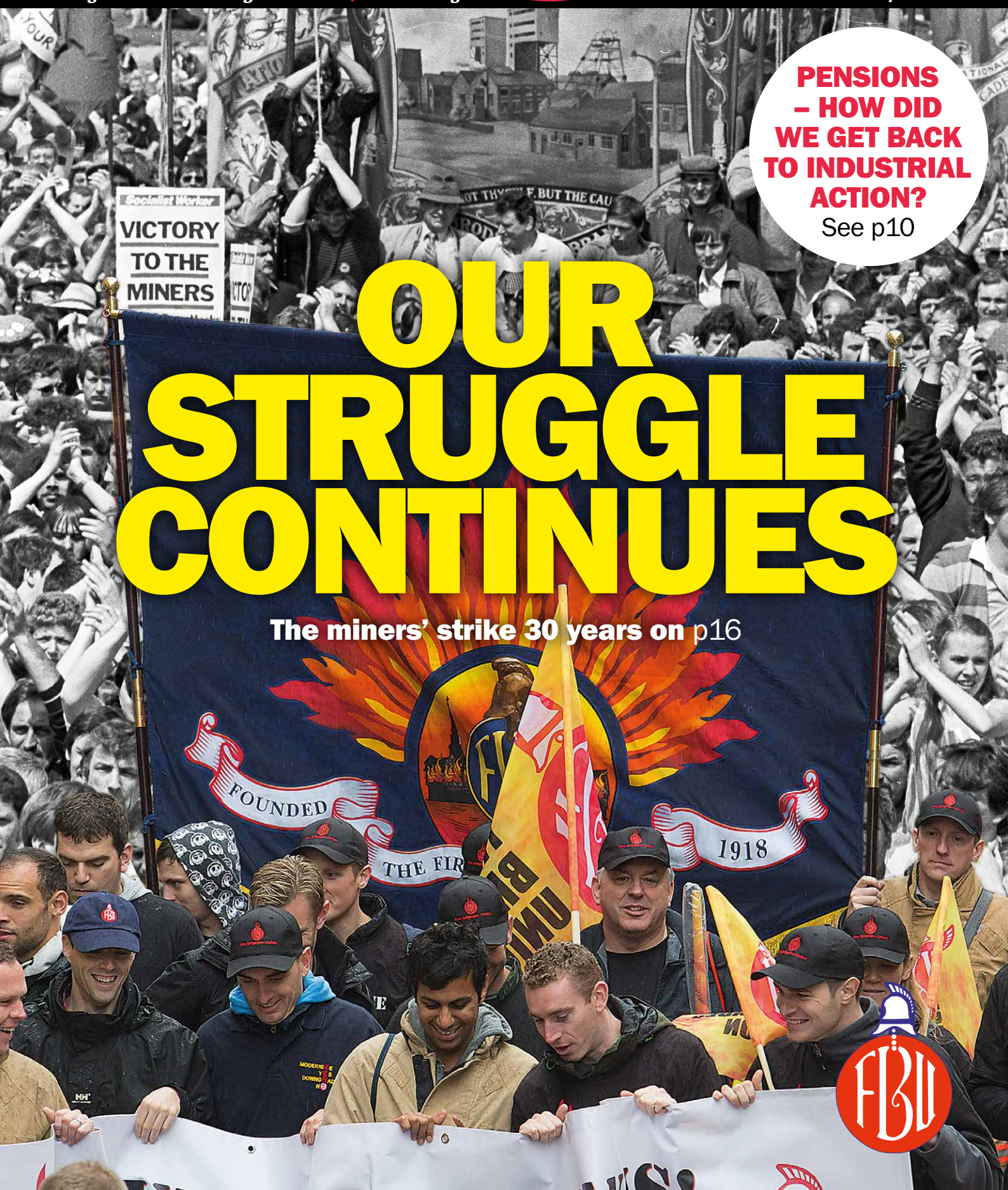
May/June 2014

**PENSIONS
– HOW DID
WE GET BACK
TO INDUSTRIAL
ACTION?**

See p10

OUR STRUGGLE CONTINUES

The miners' strike 30 years on p16





Matt Wrack

111 days of patience with government

Firefighters are most commonly praised for their bravery and self-sacrifice, but over the last three years another virtue deserves to be applied almost as liberally to our profession: that of patience.

It has now been three years since the government first began its attacks on our pensions. Three long years since they first proposed changes that will make firefighters work longer, pay more and get less in their pensions.

And it has been for three frustrating years that firefighters have painstakingly set out the case explaining why the government's proposals are unworkable, unaffordable and outright unfair.

The last four months, in particular, have tested firefighters' patience to the limits. After a bold show of strength

during nine periods of industrial action at the end of last year, we were willing to hold back from further strikes and take part in further discussions with government and our employers over how to solve this seemingly endless crisis.

We did this because our union has been clear – we do not want strikes, we want a settlement. The FBU conference has instructed the executive council to explore every possible way to try to win improvements – so that is what FBU negotiators were trying to do during the period since January.

During that period we spent time, money and resources pursuing every avenue of discussion and covering every possible nuance of the complex financial implications of the options we believe are available to government to make firefighters' pensions work.

Disgracefully, during that period, the governments at Westminster and in Wales, Scotland and N Ireland pushed through a third year of contribution increases while detailed negotiations were ongoing.

We also needed to make

service Acas and the fire service employers to attempt to find a compromise.

Sadly, despite all our patience and perseverance, after all that time the government has proved unwilling or incapable of presenting any changes to its proposals. It would prefer to bury its head in the sand.

Nobody can possibly argue with any seriousness that the Fire Brigades Union has not been willing to talk after three years of negotiations. Neither is it possible to argue

that threaten the future of firefighters and their families.

After a long period of patience – and the bravery they were only too willing to praise when it suited their political agenda – the time has come to show some of firefighters' other virtues: Strength. Unity. Determination.

FBU members deserve a massive amount of credit for their involvement in the campaign so far. It is down to your relentless campaigning at a local and national level that we are still able to press the government for a fair deal when weaker organisations would have simply rolled over.

And after seeing the vibrant, inspiring picket lines on show during the last periods of industrial action, I know for the next few periods of strike dates – which were going ahead at the time *Firefighter* went to press – that your dedication and passion for fairness will again show your local communities that firefighters will continue to stand up against attacks on their pensions – and cuts to their services.

As a union we remain totally committed to resolving this dispute through negotiation. We are ready to meet to consider a workable proposal as soon as possible. But so long as the government refuses to listen to reason, we will fight on.

We stand together.



Follow the general secretary on Twitter: @MattWrack



Patience: FBU officials at the union's lobby of MPs in March

corrections to inaccurate claims made in the House of Commons by the Westminster fire minister, Brandon Lewis, who suggested that we had not pursued improved "transitional protection" arrangements for our members.

For 111 days we put aside our suspicions over the government's promises to be committed to a negotiated solution – including a pledge to address the threat of capability dismissal – and attended meetings with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Treasury, lawyers, actuaries, the conciliation

that the government has any real case, given that they have been unable to counter a single one of our arguments with evidence.

Don't praise us then stab us in the back

The fire and rescue service was extremely busy across much of the country in the period around Christmas and after. Several members of government were only too keen to have themselves photographed slapping the backs of firefighters during the winter floods, but their words amount to nothing when they simultaneously ignore issues

Contents

Pensions, cuts, floods – our voice is heard

The miners' strike and its legacy

JOHN STURROCK/
REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



16



12

Firefighters prepare to get their message across to MPs in the main lobby of the House of Commons in Westminster

LETTER

You never know when you will need the FBU ... so stay a member

I would like to thank the FBU and Thompsons for bringing to a successful conclusion my claim for asbestosis.

I was kept informed and up to date at all times.

I have been a member of the FBU since January 1960 and an out of trade member (OOT) since 1990.

I would urge all members retiring to become an OOT member.

You never know when you may need the help that is available to you.

J E Bowden
Kent

News

- 4** South Yorkshire firefighters demonstrate against cuts
Fire chief's pay-off could pay wages of two firefighters
- 5** Control merger a mistake, says FBU
Death of Alan Brown
Vice-president (elect) elections
- 6** FBU members join Brussels protest (below) against austerity in Europe
FBU learning reps school
Chief officers get FBU message on retirement age

Features

- 10 Pensions**
How did we reach the stage of industrial action?
- 12 FBU lobby**
Reports and pictures from Westminster lobby on pensions, cuts and flooding
- 16 Battlelines**
Why the miners' strike of the 1980s is still relevant today

Regulars

- 5 Sounding off**
Why teachers are taking strike action
- 7 News focus**
Important pensions information you must act on now
- 8 Aerial ladder platform**
The origins of May Day
- 18 Health and safety**
How government policies have damaged health and safety
- 19 Legal Beagle**
Why "protected conversations" help the boss, not you
- 20 Day off**
How Sharon Thorndyke brings workplace skills to off-duty volunteering
- 22 Puzzles**
Win a Pure Jonge S3 wireless speaker
- 23 Station Cat**
The news they don't want you to hear
- 24 25-year badges**



For disciplinary and employment-related legal queries, contact your local FBU representative



Firefighters in South Yorkshire organised a last-minute protest in March outside South Yorkshire Fire Authority headquarters in Sheffield. The protest was against the authority's decision to remove fire engines from Rotherham and Barnsley fire stations. Local FBU officials say the decision was made in response to the union lodging a dispute against the implementation of crewing changes without any public consultation. More pictures from the demonstration at <http://bit.ly/FBUouthyorksdemo>

Chief's golden goodbye would pay two firefighters for a year

Pay-off

Richard Smith (right), the chief fire officer for Mid and West Wales, stood down at the end of March with a pay-off believed to be worth almost £67,000. He had held the position since 2008.

The fire authority agreed to a deal that included three months' salary in lieu of notice (worth £34,000) and a further £23,000 made up of other benefits, including performance-related pay and outstanding leave.

The FBU said it was ludicrous that, while



fire authorities were reducing firefighter numbers and cutting stations and engines across the country **and** firefighters were having their pensions slashed, the service could apparently fund a large pay-off for a senior officer.

Cerith Griffiths, Fire Brigades Union secretary for Wales, said: "This is an insult to firefighters who are working so hard to keep the public safe in the face of the biggest cuts in the fire service's history."

"This pay-off would pay for two frontline firefighters for a year. If Mr Smith wanted to show his respect to the service, he would donate his pay-off to help stem job losses."

GRAHAM LAWRENCE/DEMOTIX/PA PHOTOS

*Kevin Courtney:
Teachers love teaching
but are being crushed
by long hours and
stifling regulations*

PICTURE: JOHN HARRIS/
REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Control merger a mistake says FBU

Mergers

The FBU has described the decision to handle West Midlands and Staffordshire emergency fire and rescue calls from a shared control room in Birmingham as “a mistake”.

West Midlands fire service claimed the services expected to save £1.5 million from the move.

Of 20 control room workers in Staffordshire, seven will take voluntary

redundancy, seven have transferred to the shared control and six have moved to different roles.

Staffordshire FBU secretary Barry Downey said FBU members would “make the new control room work”. But he also pointed out that the service would lose a large amount of experience and local knowledge that those staff bring.

“We feel shared control is a mistake for Staffordshire fire and rescue service that could have been avoided.”

FBU ‘devastated’ by death

Alan Brown

FBU member Alan Brown (right) died while off duty in Edinburgh at the end of March.

Alan, 46, was discovered in an outside basement area in William Street in the city centre.

He had worked at several fire stations, mostly at Crewe Toll where he started on the white watch. At the time of his death he was watch manager at red watch, Sighthill.



Andy Fulton, FBU secretary for the east of Scotland, said: “We are devastated about the news

of Alan’s death. He was a great friend and colleague and he will be sorely missed by everyone in the fire service.

“He was a big character who was always smiling and joking. Everyone who knew Alan will have fond memories and no doubt a few funny stories about his antics.

“Our thoughts and sincerest condolences are with Alan’s family and friends at this terrible time.”

Elections for new vice-president

FBU election

The FBU is holding elections for a new vice-president (elect) who will be responsible for presiding over union meetings, including those of the executive council, when the president – currently Alan McLean – is absent, as well as any other duties assigned by the executive.

The position is open to any executive member who has served in position for at least two years and who has been an FBU member for at least five years continuously.

The new post holder will take up office at the end of the term of current

vice president, Jim Barbour, who is not re-standing.

The position is elected for a four-year term. Once elected, vice-presidents continue with their responsibilities as an executive member and must re-stand to represent their region when their term is over, even if their vice-presidential term is not complete.

Candidates can be nominated by any branch and will be chosen by a ballot of all FBU members. Nomination forms have been sent to branches across the UK and are also available at www.fbu.org.uk.

The closing date is 28 May.

SOUNDING OFF

Why teachers strike

Delegates at the National Union of Teachers conference at Easter voted for further strike action in June. NUT deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney explains the issues behind the dispute

Thousands of teachers across England and Wales took strike action on 26 March against excessive workloads and bureaucracy, the introduction of performance-related pay, the dismantling of the national pay framework and unfair changes to teachers’ pensions.

Strike action is a last resort for teachers but for many they have reached the end of their tether. The issues teachers are taking action over are not only detrimental to teachers. They risk affecting standards of education for all children and young people in schools and colleges.

Two in five teachers leave the profession within five years of starting to teach. That is a shocking statistic yet hardly surprising when you look at issues such as workload, which has become intolerable.

A government survey shows that primary teachers work nearly 60 hours a week and secondary teachers nearly 56. Every week, both primary and secondary classroom teachers work the equivalent of a day every weekend as well as a day outside the hours of 8.00am to 6.00pm.

The government is pushing ahead with performance-related pay for teachers, despite all the international evidence which shows that it does not work, creates unnecessary bureaucracy and is divisive.

Teachers do not believe that they can work until 68 or even later for a full pension and they do not believe it is educationally desirable either.

The fact that other workers are having their pensions squeezed is no justification for attacking teachers’ pensions.

NUT members will be continuing with our campaign of engaging parents and the public and applying pressure to politicians. Teachers love teaching but are crushed by the long hours and stifling accountability regime.



Fire Brigades Union members travelled to Brussels in April to take part in a demonstration against austerity policies in the European Union. It was organised by the European Trade Union Confederation and attended by campaigners from across the continent.

FBU national officer Dave Green (Above, left, with Yorks and Humberside executive

council member Ian Murray and president Alan McLean) who attended the event, said: "The campaign against austerity is global, and it's vitally important we link up with organisations from overseas and make a stand together. Communities across Europe and beyond are suffering as a result of a financial crisis they didn't create and policies they didn't vote for.

"Firefighters from the UK are proud to be standing against government cuts to the fire and rescue service and are campaigning hard against attacks on their pensions. Today's demonstration shows that our fight is shared by millions across the continent."

... See more photos from the demonstration at <http://bit.ly/FBUbrusselsdemo>

CASHBACK FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

The FBU has negotiated new savings and rewards to help union members and their families.

UnionRewards.com (arranged by Union Income) provides cashback, discounts and deals on online shopping

UNIONREWARDS.com

for holidays, clothing, groceries or gifts.

By logging in and using the links on the site to shop online, members can earn cashback payments, which will be paid directly into their bank accounts whenever they accumulate £25.

All members will also receive a free £10 "welcome bonus" once they have accumulated their first £25.

... Sign up at www.unionrewards.com

Union learning from a pro

Union learning

Former professional footballer Paul Raven was presented with a plaque (right) from the FBU after he spoke at its union learning representatives school at Wortley Hall in March.

His presentation included the history of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), the UK's oldest sporting union.

Raven, who played for



Doncaster, Grimsby and Carlisle, is Union Learning

Fund manager for the PFA.

The school was attended by 40 union learning reps, regional education and learning officials as well as others, who discussed the union's educational work.

Attendees also learned that funding for the union's education work from Unionlearn and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills had been extended until April 2015.

Fire chiefs get FBU message on retirement

Retirement age

Many firefighters still face the threat of being sacked simply for getting older, FBU national official Sean Starbuck told the Chief Fire Officers Association "People Summit" in April.

This was despite the FBU producing a significant amount of evidence showing that expecting firefighters to work until 60 is unworkable.

"The government's own evidence shows that 66% of current firefighters over 55 are below the recommended fitness level required to safely

perform the role," Starbuck said.

The non-operational jobs required for redeployment of firefighters who could not maintain operational fitness simply did not exist, he added.

"The government must provide a guarantee that firefighters will not be punished merely for getting older. All firefighters want is a fair pensions system that is based on the realities of their jobs."

The CFOA People Summit replaced its previous human resources conference and learning and development event.



Important information on your pension: why you must act now

Pensions

Two significant groups of FBU members must act if they are to avoid missing out financially, the union has said: those who have taken part in strike action over pensions and a large section of those who have retired or left the service.

Although some fire and rescue services have said that firefighters cannot buy back contributions until the ongoing trade dispute over pensions has been resolved, the rules of both the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) state that firefighters can buy back their lost service within six months of having returned to duty following periods of absence.

With the six-month anniversary of the first strike now having passed, the FBU is encouraging all members to ensure their applications for subsequent periods are in soon.

Former firefighters

In addition, many firefighters who have retired or left the service must write to their former employers to protect their positions, as they are not automatically protected from recent amendments to pension schemes.

Last year the government amended the FPS and NFPS in England, and similar changes may follow in N Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Previously, the rules had stated that former firefighters in the NFPS who returned to work for a fire authority in any capacity would have their pension reduced to ensure their combined salary and pension did not exceed the total from the last time they worked for a fire authority.

WHO NEEDS TO CONTACT THEIR AUTHORITY

- Firefighters who have been on strike and need to reclaim lost service (template at <http://bit.ly/FBUreclaimpension>)
- Former firefighters who
 - are suffering from ill health that might permanently affect their ability to work – or think they may before reaching the age of 60
 - retired after 11 April 2011 and received APBs
 (template at <http://bit.ly/FBUformerletter>)

However, this reduction would only apply to those in the FPS who returned to work as regular firefighters.

However, the new rules mean the rule applies to firefighters in the FPS who return to work for a fire authority in any capacity, including as a retained firefighter.

This change applies retrospectively from 25 September 2009.

Early payment of pensions on ill-health grounds

Firefighters who leave their jobs before normal retirement age must wait until they reach their pension scheme's 'deferred pension age' before they can draw their pension. In the FPS this age is 60.

However, firefighters in the FPS who can no longer do their jobs because of permanent disability can draw their pension early.

In the NFPS the barrier is higher: the firefighter must be permanently unable to undertake any job as a result of their disability.

The new rules change the barrier for the FPS so that they are the same as the NFPS, so any former firefighters in the FPS currently receiving their pensions because disability prevented them from working in their former roles may now have their

pensions reviewed and terminated.

As a result, firefighters who are suffering from ill health that might permanently affect their ability to work – or think they will before reaching the age of 60 should write to their fire authority.

Changes to how additional pension benefits are calculated

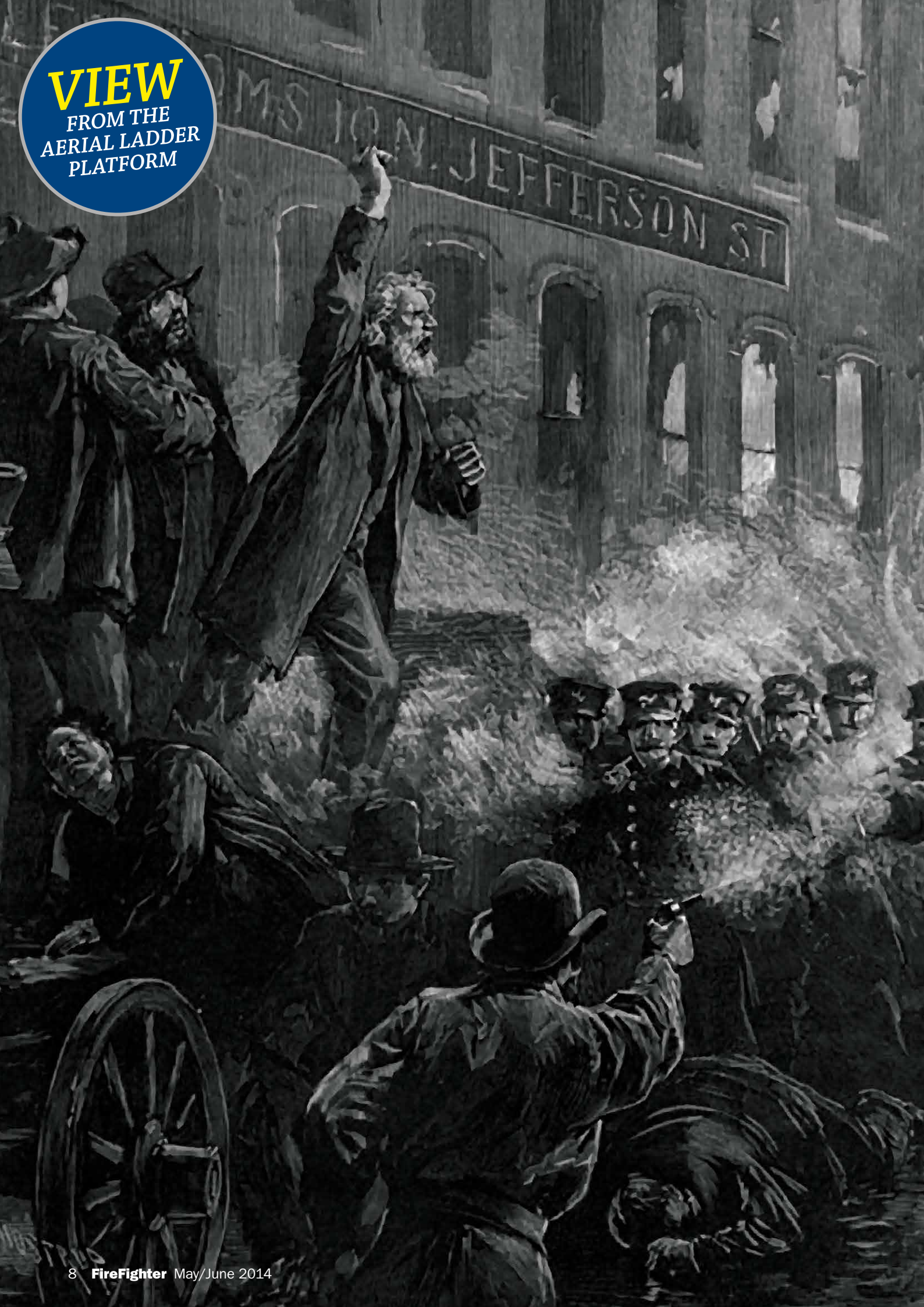
Firefighters that received long service increment (LSI) payments before they were scrapped or currently receive any continual professional development (CPD) payments are entitled to additional pension benefits (APBs).

The rate of inflation affecting these payments had been determined by the retail price index (RPI): a measure of inflation published every month by the Office for National Statistics that looks at the changing cost of a "basket" of retail goods and services.

Under the new rules, the inflation will be calculated using the consumer price index (CPI), an alternative method that is generally lower than the RPI. This change will apply retrospectively to include the 2010-11 tax year onwards.

Therefore all firefighters who retired after 11 April 2011 and received APBs must write to their authority.

VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM



May Day

On 4 May 1886, a rally to demand an eight-hour working day taking place in Chicago's Haymarket Square ended in bloodshed. As police attempted to disperse the crowd, an unidentified person threw a bomb.

Police fired into the crowd and at least four demonstrators and seven police officers were killed. Scores were seriously injured. Four men were later hanged for the bombing, despite there being no evidence that they were involved. They were later pardoned.

Three years after the rally, labour parties from 20 countries meeting in Paris at the first congress of the Second Socialist International called for international demonstrations to mark the

anniversary of the "Haymarket Affair".

The protests became annual and by 1891 were known as May Day. They coincided with the traditional spring festival in much of Europe.

In 1904, the International Socialist Conference called on all labour parties and trade unions to stop work on 1 May and demonstrate for the establishment of the eight-hour day.

1 May is now a national holiday in more than 80 countries and is celebrated unofficially in many others, including the UK.

As ever, events across the country were planned by trade unions and other organisations and groups from the labour movement, as well as pensioners,

anti-globalisation organisations, students, political bodies and many others, united in their calls for trade union rights, human rights and international solidarity.

The FBU's London and Southern regions support the London May Day Organising Committee, which organises a major event in the capital every year.

This year's event was designed to have a particular focus on commemorating the lives of socialist MP Tony Benn and Bob Crow, former RMT general secretary. You can find out more at www.londonmayday.org.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack was due to speak in Leeds on 3 May and in Chesterfield on 5 May.



*Contemporary
(and inaccurate)
lithograph of
the Haymarket
Square events*

Pensions: How did we get here?

As *Firefighter* went to press, the FBU had announced new dates for industrial action in England, Scotland and Wales after the Westminster government failed to improve its offer on pensions. Although a serious offer from government might ensure postponement of that action, if one is not forthcoming strikes were expected for England and Wales on 2, 3 and 4 May and a ban on voluntary overtime was set to take place between 4 and 9 May in England and Wales and 2 and 9 May in Scotland. How did we get to the stage of announcing fresh strikes and overtime bans? *Firefighter* looks at the developments that led up to the decision.

Before the most recent dates for industrial action were announced, negotiations between the FBU and the Department for Communities and Local Government – as well as the devolved national governments – had been taking place for three years.

After the last strike over pensions on 3 January this year, both the union and government undertook work examining financial, technical and legal issues.

The official Government Actuary's Department completed work on costing options in mid-March. Union negotiators met representatives from the Treasury on 8 April to discuss the government proposal to raise the minimum age that anyone could retire without a tax levy from 55 to 57.

At the meeting, Treasury officials said that the proposal did not prevent the DCLG (who were also in attendance)

making an improved offer for the 2015 pension scheme.

The FBU also met the government conciliation service ACAS, which is devoted to preventing and resolving employment disputes. FBU officials outlined their concerns and frustration with the lack of progress.

Following a meeting of the union's executive council on 9 and 10 April, the FBU wrote to Westminster fire minister Brandon Lewis saying that if the union had not received any proposals by 24 April, it would deduce that the government was unwilling or unable to offer any improvement.

For up-to-date news on the pensions campaign and all other FBU issues, check into www.fbu.org.uk or @fbunational

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "We believe we have given ample time and opportunity for the government to present any improvements and have refrained from strikes while these talks have been ongoing."

Lack of progress

In a letter dated 23 April, Lewis commended the way in which the union had engaged with government on several fronts, but did not present any new proposals.

Although, during negotiations, Lewis had assured firefighters that he would seek to address the threat of firefighters being sacked merely for getting older, there was no change in the government's position.

On top of this, during negotiations the government imposed a third annual increase in firefighters' pension contributions, taking most firefighters to 14.2%, one of the highest in the public or



FBU pensions protesters highlight the effect of government pension proposals

**FBU
members
must act now to
reclaim pensions
from strike
periods
SEE P7**

private sector, and issued proposals for a fourth increase.

In addition, the FBU was forced to correct publicly the minister's claims in the House of Commons that the union had never sought to protect its members from pension changes.

On 7 April, the minister had responded to a question from Alison Seabek, the Labour MP for Plymouth Moor View, by saying that the FBU did not "go down the road" of seeking to obtain protection from changes for members during negotiations, as had been provided for the police.

In her question, which resulted from a visit to Crownhill fire station and other FBU branches in her constituency, Seabek pointed out that one

"We have given ample time and opportunity for the government to present any improvements and have refrained from strikes while talks have been ongoing"

39-year-old firefighter, who had served since he was 18, would have to work for 42 years rather than 30 as a result of the government's changes.

In his reply, the minister said: "My understanding is that, at the time that arrangement was made with the police,

the Fire Brigades Union did not go down that road.

"More firefighters are protected by the scheme we have put in place than any other scheme in the public sector, and conversations with the FBU remain ongoing."

Wrack said: "This answer is inaccurate and presents a complete misrepresentation of discussions we have had with DCLG and with the minister and his team over many months.

"The issue of protection has been raised regularly at all such meetings.

"Despite this, Brandon Lewis and his team have been very firm in expressing their opposition to any such improvements in relation to transitional protection."

Dates set

As a result, at a meeting on 24 April the union's executive council unanimously decided to take further industrial action.

Wrack said: "After three years of negotiations and an intense four months presenting an indisputable, evidence-based case for the need to ensure a pension scheme that takes into account the unique occupation of firefighting, the government is still burying its head in the sand.

"Several members of government were only too keen to praise firefighters during the winter floods, but their words amount to nothing when they simultaneously ignore issues that threaten the future of firefighters and their families.

"Nevertheless, we remain totally committed to resolving the dispute through negotiation, and are ready to meet to consider a workable proposal as soon as possible."



Above: President Alan McLean and general secretary Matt Wrack listen as National Union of Teachers executive member Dave Harvey addresses lobbying firefighters in House of Commons committee room 14;

Below: Firefighters in the Central Lobby of the Palace of Westminster

LOBBY PICTURES: MARK THOMAS





FBU officials (l - r) Nigel McCullen (Hampshire), Andy Vingoe (Suffolk), Cameron Matthews and Kerry Baigent (Cambridgeshire)



Lyn Brown shadow fire minister with Paul Embery and EC member Ian Leahair (London)



Bolsover MP Dennis Skinner discusses the issues with Surrey FBU official Vinny Jones



Matt Wrack addresses the lobby

Firefighters descend on Westminster to lobby MPs over pensions, cuts and flooding

Officials from across the UK speak truth to power



Firefighters from across the UK descended on Westminster on 26 March to lobby their MPs over issues affecting them and the fire and rescue service.

Around 200 Fire Brigades Union members were present at the event based in the House of Commons' committee room 14.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack told them: "Firefighters' campaigns over pensions and cuts continue. It's vital that we complement industrial action and

vibrant local campaign work with a serious engagement of decision makers in Westminster.

"Over the past few years we've been pleased to find allies among MPs around the UK who realise the devastation that cuts to fire and rescue services are creating in their constituencies — and the injustice of the unfair pension scheme that the government is imposing on firefighters in their communities.

"It's important that we all stand together in the name of public and firefighter safety, whether it is families marching against fire station closures on their streets, or politicians fighting for more effective responses to flooding within national politics."

The lobby was also addressed by MPs Kate Hoey and John McDonnell, members of the FBU's parliamentary group. They emphasised the importance of firefighters continuing to ask questions of their MPs, particularly as the general election drew closer.

Members of the National Union of Teachers were on strike on the day of the lobby over excessive workloads and bureaucracy; the introduction of performance-related pay;

the dismantling of their national pay framework; and unfair changes to teachers' pensions. NUT executive member Dave Harvey addressed the lobbying firefighters, linking the shared concerns of teachers and firefighters.

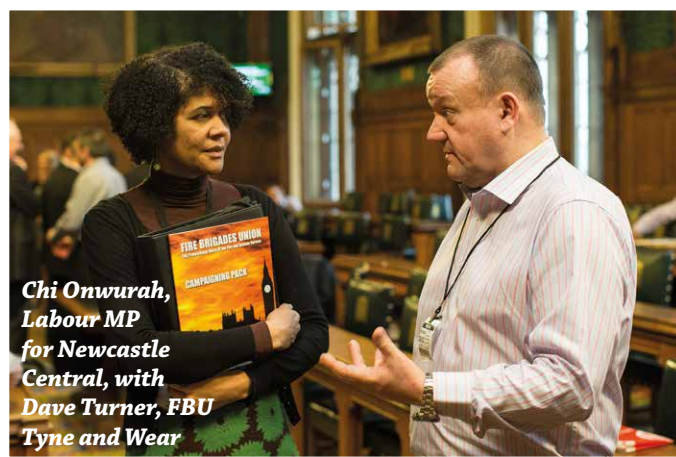
Union representatives met the day after the lobby to consider the next stages in the FBU's campaigns.

Issues firefighters raised

■ **Flooding:** 70% of England's fire and rescue services were involved in recent floods, but there is still no clear duty for them to respond to floods (unlike in Scotland and N Ireland) and funding and resources are still not adequate for the threats faced by local communities.

■ **Cuts:** There have been 3,845 firefighter job cuts across the UK since 2011. This has slowed down responses to 999 emergency calls and increased the risk to communities.

■ **Pensions:** firefighters have seen three years of pension contribution increases and are facing a fourth. Government is proceeding with plans for an unworkable pension scheme for the future.



John Maggs (left)
with Stephen
Williams, MP
for Bristol West



A vital part of campaigning

John Maggs, FBU brigade organiser for Avon, had to wait – but he got a result ...

joined FBU officials from across the UK at Parliament to lobby MPs of all parties.

Although all Avon area MPs had been invited to attend, there was not much initial interest.

With just two MPs replying with their apologies it did not look like it was going to be particularly successful.

For a while this seemed to be the case as officials from South West region waited patiently.

But we didn't give up and did some badgering by phoning MPs' parliamentary offices with some success.

Issues firefighters raised

I received a call to say my MP, Stephen Williams (Lib Dem, Bristol West), was willing to meet me for 10 minutes, an hour after the lobby was due

to finish. So as my comrades made their exit, I went down to the central lobby to sit and wait for him.

The meeting reminded me why lobbying is so important.

Mr Williams has previously heard all about our pension concerns from me, so I concentrated on the impact cuts would have on the fire

and rescue service, both locally and nationally. I also emphasised the need for funding for flood rescue resources.

Although the MP was aware of the decreasing budget, he did not know about the lack of funding for flooding relief work – despite being a junior minister in DCLG and a

colleague of the fire minister!

Mr Williams agreed to arrange a meeting with Avon fire and rescue service's chief officer to discuss this. A follow-up meeting is to be arranged soon.

Issues firefighters raised

So will Stephen Williams go to his senior ministers as a convert to say how important it is to settle our pensions and reverse the spending cuts? Probably not.

But he now knows more about the fire and rescue service than before and knows how passionate FBU members are, not just about our own issues but how cutting resources affects the public we serve.

If every MP is given the same knowledge by discussing the subject with those who know most about the service, then attitudes in Parliament can start to change.

Writing to and meeting MPs is a vital part of campaigning.

Lobby *your* MP to sign motion on fire cuts

The number of MPs who signed a parliamentary motion opposing cuts to the fire and rescue service grew to 32 as a result of the lobby. As Firefighter went to press it had grown further to 59.

The motion (EDM 1216) calls on the government to halt all cuts to fire and rescue and to make sure there is enough money to keep people safe.

All FBU members and supporters should contact their MP to ask them to sign as well.

**You can help by visiting
<http://bit.ly/fbucutsedm>**

BATTLE

As trade unionists across the country commemorate the 30th anniversary of

Thirty years ago the vast majority of the UK's 187,000 mineworkers were on strike, from Yorkshire to Kent and from South Wales to Scotland. The action began on 12 March 1984, six days after the Thatcher government announced its intention to shut over 70 pits. The strike lasted nine days short of a year.

The Thatcher period still casts a dark shadow over the country, making a cruel mockery of the words she spoke on 4 May 1979, as she took over as prime minister from James Callaghan. "Where there is discord, may we bring harmony," she said. "And where there is despair, may we bring hope." Two

years later working people despaired as 2 million manufacturing jobs had been lost – and the country was divided as Thatcher set about destroying the National Union of Mineworkers. Her government of extremists was determined to crush the miners' union, regardless of the cost. They believed that by destroying the NUM they would end the influence of all trade unions.


Astonishing solidarity

The solidarity of the strikers, and the support they received from across the land, astonished the government. Working people from rail workers to teachers, from health workers to civil servants held collections, gathered food parcels and joined demonstrations to show their unity with the miners.

So the government changed its tack. Unable to destroy the sense of bonding that held Britain's mining communities together, they determined to close the entire industry.

"It was an act of industrial vandalism for purely political ends," says FBU general secretary Matt Wrack. "British manufacturing was sacrificed to Thatcher's loathing of organised working people. It has never recovered."

Today just 2.5 million of the UK's 64 million population works in manufacturing. Textiles, shipbuilding, car production (as opposed to assembly) are things of the past. We now need to import coal. Matt Wrack is proud of the support firefighters offered to miners three decades ago.



October 1984: Police in riot gear confront a mass picket of striking miners at Thurcroft pit in South Yorkshire

ELINES

the beginning of the Miners' strike, *Firefighter* looks at its continuing legacy

"Perhaps we understood more than most the solidarity that comes from relying on colleagues in hazardous workplaces. But it is also because of an innate sense of decency that always puts our union on the side of the oppressed and maltreated," he says.

Media hysteria

But Wrack also warns that the tactics used by the Tories and their friends in those days are much the same in the smooth PR Cameron era as they were in blatantly confrontational Thatcher times.

"You have only to see the media hysteria when we talk of taking industrial action to see this," he says.

"In 1984 ordinary working men and women seeking to preserve their incomes

and their societies were portrayed as a traitorous 'enemy within'. Pictures in the newspapers after the confrontation at Orgreave showed wounded policemen but never depicted assaulted miners. They wanted to create the impression that all miners were thugs.

"Whenever we consider industrial action we are portrayed the same way in the media. And the union is always

"You were attacked and vilified as criminals because you looked after your workplaces, communities and families"

to blame. There is never a suggestion that intransigent management or government could be at fault."

As the FBU's Sean Starbuck pointed out in a message to the NUM on the anniversary of the 1984 dispute, "You were attacked and vilified as criminals simply because you looked after your workplaces, communities and families." And he spoke for us all as he added, "We will never forget the pride and dignity you showed in those dark days."

The positive news is that Thatcher failed in her crusade to destroy unions which remain the largest voluntary organisation in the UK with 6.5 million members. The Conservative Party has 134,000, down from 253,000 since Cameron became leader.

REGULATION

Government: toxic, corrosive and hazardous

**In
just four
years the
government has
turned back
the clock 40
years**

Hugh Robertson, TUC senior policy officer, examines the negative effect on health and safety of the coalition government

It is now four years since the last election and in that time the coalition government has wreaked havoc on our health and safety system.

According to the TUC, it has:

- Cut state funding of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) by more than 40 per cent
- Set up three reviews to look at the "burden" of health and safety regulation and another to look at the function of the HSE that have led to disruption and reductions in protection for workers
- Cut HSE and local authority inspections drastically
- Blocked new regulations and removed a number of existing protections
- Ditched important codes of practice
- Cut the level of support and guidance available to employers and health and safety representatives
- Changed rules on what employers have to report about accidents and other incidents, undermining the amount of knowledge that is available on levels of injury and illness
- Made extensive cuts in the HSE's work on occupational health
- Blocked new initiatives from Europe and tried to reduce existing protection provided by European Union regulations

- Made it much harder for workers to claim compensation after they are injured or made ill
 - Removed health and safety protection from the vast majority of self-employed workers.
- In just four years the

and safety laws threatens a big increase in injuries and ill health. But, because the government has changed what employers must report and how the statistics are recorded, we may never know the true extent of the damage.

Although the funding cuts

culture perform better overall.

With the next general election a year way at most, the question is whether the HSE and our health and safety system could survive the election of a government committed to more cuts and deregulation and the neglect and abuse of health and safety institutions and legislation.

The TUC says everybody at work needs a government that is committed to protecting them. It says that a major change in the attitude of government to health and safety is required to prevent massive health problems which could cost the state billions and claim the lives of many workers.

Unions have drawn up a list of 10 simple measures that they want to see from a future government.

These include a demand that all workplaces are inspected regularly; the same priority for occupational health as for injury prevention; removing exposure to all cancer-causing chemicals; better controls of dust; a maximum temperature in the workplace; better rights for health and safety representatives; and legal duties for directors.

If implemented they would have a huge impact on reducing the toll of death, injury and illness that is still an everyday part of working life for so many people.

- TUC report on the government's record on health and safety: <http://tinyurl.com/n58ehuy>
- TUC manifesto: <http://tinyurl.com/n3xv3hl>



government has turned back the clock by 40 years – to before the Health and Safety at Work Act was passed in 1974.

The legislation recognised the importance of going beyond just immediate safety at work to include occupational diseases. It also established protection for all workers, including the self-employed.

This attack on health

have hit the HSE and local authorities hard, most of the changes the government has forced through in terms of reduced inspections and removing protection have had nothing to do with the cuts.

This government sees regulations on health and safety as a "burden", despite strong evidence that organisations with a strong health and safety

Legal Beagle

Let's settle this outside the law

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Q What are “protected conversations”?

A The government has introduced provisions that allow employers to talk to workers “off the record” to arrange settlement agreements. They are known as “protected conversations” and came into effect in July 2013.

Q What are they for?

A The government claims that employers wanted to be able to talk to their staff about sensitive employment issues – such as retirement and maternity leave – but were worried that what they said could result in legal claims being made against them. To help their friends in business, the government decided it was all too legally daunting for them to handle and that employers needed protection from their workers.

Q What was the position before?

A Before the introduction of “protected conversations”, employers could speak to their workers “without prejudice” and the conversation or statement could not be disclosed as evidence in an employment tribunal or court. But, for the conversation to be covered, it had to be as part of negotiations for any settlement agreement and only applied when there was a genuine attempt to settle an existing dispute. If there was no dispute, then the conversation could not be “without prejudice”.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Q What do the changes mean for workers?

A The “protected conversations” provisions remove the requirement for there to be an existing dispute. An employer can now hold a conversation with a worker about important employment issues in the knowledge that the details will be withheld from any ordinary unfair dismissal tribunal. In short, the change removes vital protections from the worker and shifts the balance of power even further in favour of the employer.

The provisions are particularly damaging to workers wishing to pursue a case of constructive dismissal.

An employer could hold a conversation with a worker on a sensitive employment issue which has the effect of destroying the working relationship and leads to the worker opting to resign and yet the crucial conversation could not be used as evidence in an employment tribunal. Of course, while most employers will not abuse the new provisions, there will, unfortunately, be many who do.

Are all conversations ‘protected’?

A While there is plenty in the new arrangements that employers can potentially abuse, some crucial safeguards are still in place.

Conversations cannot be “protected”, and therefore kept out of a tribunal, when they relate to discrimination and some forms of unfair dismissal. Moreover, there are numerous pitfalls for employers when attempting to make a settlement agreement. An employer can easily find themselves unprotected if there is impropriety or where procedures are not followed correctly.

ACAS has produced *Settlement Agreements: A Guide*, which lists various examples of what might be deemed “improper” behaviour by employers. For example, an employer putting undue pressure on a worker to sign an agreement would be regarded as improper behaviour. As a general rule it is suggested that ten calendar days should be allowed for an employee to consider the terms of an agreement, unless it is agreed otherwise.

In addition, all forms of harassment, discrimination and victimisation are listed as inappropriate behaviour in the process of confirming a settlement agreement. It is important to note, however, that whether or not the employer has acted improperly will always be for the employment tribunal to decide.

If firefighters are approached by their employer regarding a settlement agreement, they are advised to contact their FBU representative immediately for support and advice on the process – especially if they believe that their employer might have acted inappropriately.

The delight on youngsters' faces is ample reward

Sharon Thorndyke has at least two crucial roles in her life – watch manager at Norfolk fire control and volunteer for the East Coast Truckers charity

Sharon Thorndyke is used to being in control as well as being part of a team: after all, she's worked at the Norfolk fire and rescue service control centre in Hethersett near Norwich for the past 18 years.

And, even outside work, the green watch manager retains that ethos in her role as a volunteer charity worker.

Sharon is in charge of the database that helps the East Coast Truckers' Charity fulfil its remit of "Delivering Loads of Fun to Special Children". She is also the charity's child liaison officer – a crucial post.

Thanks to the charity, disabled and disadvantaged youngsters in East Anglia from five to 16 enjoy fun-filled days out – and even family holidays by the sea.

The East Coast Truckers' Charity is best known for its annual children's convoy, which has been making its way from Norwich to Great Yarmouth via Lowestoft and back one day in summer for decades.

"It's become very well known locally, and people line parts of the route and cheer us on," says Sharon, who transformed herself into Mother Christmas back in December to hand out presents at the East Coast Truckers' children's

Christmas party. It's all part of getting involved.

Sharon first got involved with the charity five years ago. "I started out rattling buckets in the street and looking after children on day trips. The next step up was arranging trips and events with a couple of other women."

Before long, she was managing the database and volunteering to act as child liaison officer.

Organisation

As Firefighter went to press, Sharon was busy working on arrangements for this summer's convoy, matching children with lorry drivers – who are all individual members of East Coast Truckers – and carers for the day. A lot of planning and organisation goes in behind the scenes to ensure the day goes smoothly.

To minimise the chance of anyone getting lost, for instance, each young passenger is issued with a t-shirt and hoodie on arrival, says Sharon. And each young passenger has a wristband that includes the name of the lorry cab they came down in.

The countdown has already begun for organisers of the convoy, which is planned with



Sharon (2nd left) on an Easter egg hunt with members of Holt



View from the cab as the convoy reaches Great Yarmouth



Sharon (centre) joins an FBU picketline



fire crew who gave children a chance to see the fire appliance



Police outriders lead the way



near military precision. The 29th convoy is due to leave from outside Norwich County Hall at 10am on 24 August.

Safety is paramount – the route is dotted with safety-briefed volunteer stewards in high-vis jackets.

There will be around 80 lorry cabs, as usual, each with a young person strapped into the front seat. Police outriders will lead the way. Last year, a fire engine from Great Yarmouth joined the convoy.

An ambulance was on hand, in case of medical emergencies en route. “This meant all three emergency services were represented,” says Sharon.

Cavalcade

YouTube is awash with footage from previous years. No doubt lots more will be uploaded this time round as sightseers and supporters capture the cavalcade on their mobiles.

The families of truckers don’t miss out if they want to come along: there are two buses behind the convoy taking them along to join the fun.

Some things have changed. Lorries no longer toot their horns near marshland so as not to distress wildlife.

Highlights of the day include local dignitaries and celebrities turning out to wave off the convoy in Norwich, and an afternoon of rides and a picnic at Pleasurewood Hills theme park near Lowestoft.

But it is the parade of lorries in Great Yarmouth that is the highlight for many – and a huge photo and YouTube opportunity.

The annual convoy is just one of a series of events organised by the charity throughout the year. Before the “Big Day”, there is an Easter egg race to organise and a good few summer fetes to get around.

Sharon’s husband Derek, a lorry driver and East Coast Trucker himself, is heavily involved in putting on a three-day fundraising music festival for the charity in Norwich in July. On the day of the convoy, he usually helps direct traffic.

Then there are the seaside holidays, which the charity has

The annual convoy is just one of a series of events organised by the charity throughout the year

been providing since 2011 at California Cliffs holiday park near Great Yarmouth.

“Heidi-Hi” is a two-bedroom static caravan that sleeps six and was built to accommodate people who use wheelchairs. “It was bought with a bequest to the charity,” says Sharon. “It’s great because it means that the whole family can enjoy a holiday together.”

There is also a chalet at Vauxhall Holiday Park in Great Yarmouth where the charity provides stays of up to a week. Last year, 64 families had holidays by the sea thanks to East Coast Truckers.

Control staff are, of course, crucial players in the fire and rescue response team – receiving calls from distressed callers, directing crews to fires, floods or accidents.

Cool head

To work in control it helps to have a cool head, unflappable manner, a keen eye for detail and lots of common sense. Sharon has no doubt drawn on these qualities in her role as an East Coast Truckers’ Charity volunteer.

And for Sharon, just seeing the delight on youngsters’ faces, on the convoy, at the Christmas party, is ample reward for the hours she puts in. “It’s really special and makes everything worthwhile.”

● www.eastcoastruckers.org

Prize quiz



Win a Pure Jongo S3 wireless portable speaker

HOW TO ENTER

To win a Pure Jongo S3 wireless speaker please send your answers by 30 June 2014 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May/June 2014), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

PA IMAGES



1 In 1956 who switched on Britain's first full scale nuclear power station?

- A – The Queen
B – Winston Churchill
C – The Lord Privy Seal Richard Butler
D – The Duke of Edinburgh

2 In 1970 Alexander Solzhenitsyn won what prize for literature?

- A – The Lenin prize for literature
B – The Nobel Prize in Literature
C – The Pulitzer Prize
D – The Man Booker International Prize

3 Name the weather forecaster who denied a hurricane was on its way in 1987

- A – George Cowling
B – Sian Lloyd
C – Ian McCaskill
D – Michael Fish

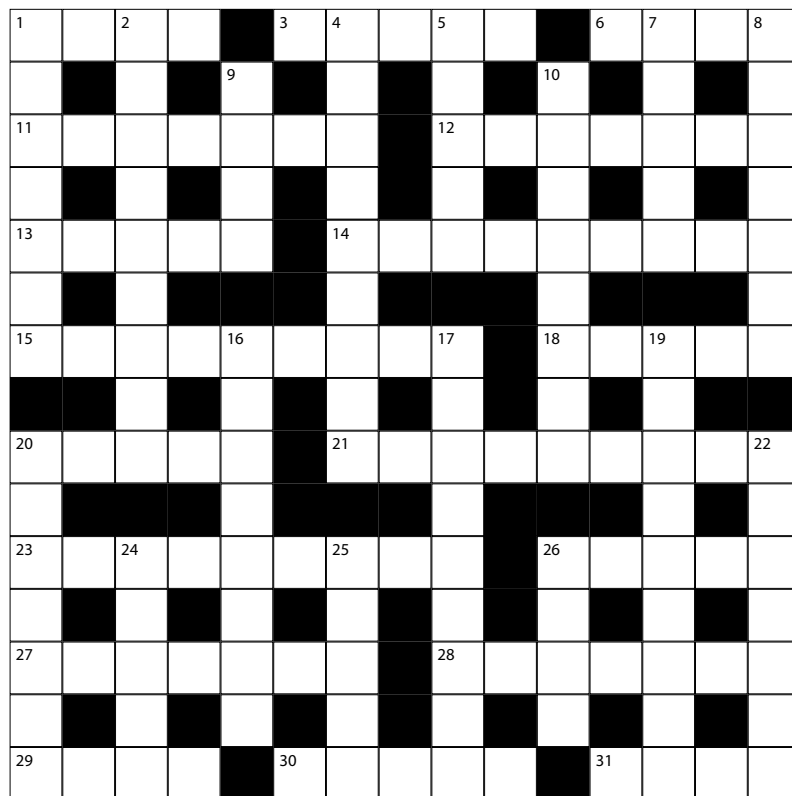
4 New legislation for hazardous chemicals called the Hazchem Code was introduced after which London fire?

- A – King's Cross tube station fire 1987
B – Smithfield fire 1958
C – Dudgeon's Wharf explosion 1969
D – Camden Market fire 2008

5 Betty Boothroyd became the first-ever woman Speaker of the House of Commons in what year?

- A – 1987
B – 1992
C – 1892
D – 1929

PA IMAGES



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Against (4)
3 First president of democratic India (5)
6 Operatic solo (4)
11 First president of democratic South Africa (7)
12 Patrice, first president of democratic Congo (7)
13 Vote into office (5)
14 Bring to an end (9)
15 Dimension of an object (or measure of stupidity?) (9)
18 Anaesthetic used by early 22 (5)
20 Rear of vessel (5)
21 Townies' description of countryside (as used by drummer?) (3,6)
23 Assessment, especially of someone's work (9)
26 One who slides around on snow (5)
27 Put one on a cut, or spread it on a wall (7)
28 John Lennon song (7)
29 Solid ground (or arrive on it) (4)
30 Capital of 3's country (5)
31 Facial feature (or hit it) (4)

DOWN

- 1** Rest for one's arm! (7)
2 Citrus fruit (9)
4 The passing of law (9)
5 Measuring stick or monarch (5)
7 Style of rhythm, song and dance originating in Cuba (5)
8 Non-professional (7)
9 Root vegetable loaded with sugars (4)
10 About to happen (8)
16 First president of democratic Kenya (8)
17 24, for example (9)
19 First premier of independent Vietnam (2,3,4)
20 Blade used by 22 (7)
22 One who cuts people for a living (7)
24 Edible swimming crustacean (5)
25 Put tennis ball into play (5)
26 One who's in when others are out (4)

Last issue's answers and winners



Crossword solution April

April quiz answers

- 1** – C The Berlin Wall
2 – A 25th
3 – A The Simpsons
4 – B Sky TV
5 – A The Tiananmen Square massacre

Winner of March quiz

William Thompson, Hartlepool

Station Cat


Got those Old Blue Light Sell-off Blues

SOLD: To Capita a company with a track record of failure and an unhealthy interest in the emergency services

CHRIS ISON/PA PHOTOS



The rewards of failure

 Fire minister Brandon Lewis could hardly contain himself. He tweeted the moment he'd worked it out, on July 15 last year: "Labour voted against capping max level of benefits anyone can claim being at the average family wage. They still believe in the welfare state."

They still believe in the welfare state? Dear dear. Glad the minister warned us. Some people will never learn.

Yes, that would be the Brandon Lewis whose latest speech began: "I am delighted to be here with you today and I'd like to thank Capita for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to speak with you all on 'reforming blue light services'."

Capita – known to *Private Eye* magazine and many of its clients as Crapita – organised the conference to "examine how to develop effective partnerships and discuss the future for integrating our emergency services". Which is code for cutting them back and letting Crapita make money from them.

And yes, this would be the same Crapita that has made a hash of dozens of central and local government contracts, but still manages to win nearly half of them.

It mismanaged the courts and tribunals interpreting contract for the Ministry of Justice, messed

up individual learning accounts so badly that the project had to be scrapped – the list goes on and on.


And, yes again, this would be the same Crapita to which Mr Lewis sold the Fire Service College.

At the time of the sale, Andy Parker, joint chief operating officer at Capita, said: "The acquisition further expands and complements Capita's existing capability in the emergency services market."

Control of the blue light services would, of course, do even more for Crapita in "the emergency services market". Are they about to get it?

Your Cat would like to say that worse things have happened, but she can't think of any.

Sacked – for putting lives before money

 The pretty market town of Tenbury Wells in north west Worcestershire still has its second fire engine, at least for now.

Worcestershire Conservatives are livid about it, and are preparing to exact vengeance on the man they hold responsible for this sad state of affairs: Conservative councillor Phil Grove.

They had planned on saving an estimated £38,000 a year by taking the fire engine away, but Cllr Grove voted against the move, telling the *Ludlow and*

Tenbury Wells Advertiser: "As a policeman I had a five-year-old


boy die in my arms from carbon monoxide poisoning. I put lives in front of money and I believe that was the right decision."

Grove has been suspended from the Conservative Party group and removed from the fire authority.

Which places Tenbury's representative on the county council, Dr Ken Pollock, in an awkward position. He can't support Mr Grove, or the Tories will exact the same revenge on him. But he can't support the removal of the fire engine – not if he wants to keep his seat on the county council. No wonder he had no comment to offer any of his local papers.




Let's hope it's catching

 Something dreadful has happened to James Cleverly (*above*), Conservative chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

He recently tweeted: "Find myself agreeing with much (but not quite all) of the points made by Matt Wrack of FBU about fire service change at LGA Fire conference."

Let Mr Cleverly note the dreadful fate of Councillor Phil Grove.

Talking about the floods ...

 The Lib Dem spin machine has sprung to the defence of its floods minister Dan Rogerson. It's not true that he was kept out of sight during the floods because he wasn't up to the job, they say, and to prove it they are asking all their MPs to tweet in his support.

Their email, leaked to political blogger Guido Fawkes, was headed: "Subject: Tweeting in support of Dan Rogerson".

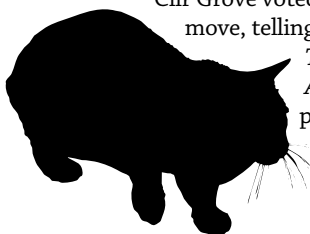
It told MPs: "In order to rebut the story, if you could tweet/blog in support of Dan that would be really useful."

"Our lines are: As floods minister Dan Rogerson has been playing a key active role in the government's response to the flooding. He has attended every COBRA meeting since the flooding began."

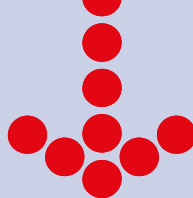
"He has been liaising with agencies and water companies to make sure contingency plans are in place; as part of this, he has spoken to gold commanders and CEOs of affected companies on a daily basis."

"He has also visited flooded areas to make sure everything possible is being done to assist affected communities on the ground. He is chairing the Somerset Levels and Moors action plan group, which is working to a tight timescale to develop a long-term solution in the area."

Talking to important folk, attending meetings, liaising with agencies, visiting flooded areas, chairing an action group – what more can a chap do?



25-year badges



Dave Beuster (l), red watch, Newton Aycliffe, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dave Welsh



Mike Money (l), blue watch, Newton Aycliffe, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dave Welsh



John Chelton (l), Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Kerry Baigent



Peter Cummings receives his 25-year badge from FBU rep Peter Crossett with Glengormley, N Ireland FRS, red watch looking on (l - r), Glen Haughian, Robert Monahan, former FBU rep Peter Cummings, FBU rep Peter Crossett, Philip Osborne and branch chair Philip Elliot



West Yorkshire firefighters (l - r), Mark Gledhill, Andy Scott, Alan Tate and Tony Bottomley receive their 25-year badges from ULR HQ branch secretary Ben Paolozzi



Steve Ball (l), white watch, Basildon, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Riccardo la Torre



Doug Brown (l), white watch, Lochgelly, Fife, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Scott McCabe



Tony Lanni (l), white watch, Basildon, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Riccardo la Torre



Wynne Evans (r), Abecrave, Mid and West Wales, receives his 25-year badge from vice-chair Lawrence Larmond



Chris Atkinson (l), West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from ULR HQ branch secretary Ben Paolozzi



Phil Grantham (l), Burgess Hill, West Sussex, receives his 25-year badge from regional treasurer Bill Woodfine



Julian Green (r), Oxfordshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Rachel Dobson



Stephen A Mitchell (centre right), blue watch, Old Swan, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Tony Richardson

Please send prints or digital files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk. Please include full details for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

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